Comments and Communications

The Informal Research Laboratory—A Proposal

One of the areas of international cooperation which has consistently functioned with maximum goodwill has been the informal research laboratory. The examples set by the Marine Laboratories at Naples and at Woods Hole need not be detailed here. During the summer months, research workers, freed of their teaching duties of the academic season, come from universities and laboratories all over the world to spend their vacation time together in discussion and research. The opportunities for free exchange of ideas, the deeper insight into the problems of the individual scientist, and the stimulation derived from working together closely are of inestimable value both to the scientists themselves and to the cause of international understanding.

Unfortunately, only a few such laboratories for informal research are open to scientists throughout the world, and these few institutions are restricted to a definitely circumscribed group of sciences. I know of no such laboratory devoted to chemical or to physical research. The emphasis has been mainly on the sciences related to marine biology.

In view of the proven benefits to be derived from such institutions and the paucity of adequate installations for the several sciences, I believe it would be advantageous for such an organization as UNESCO to investigate the feasibility of sponsoring and initiating such laboratories. It would emphasize the purpose of such an international laboratory if its foundations would be set by an organization devoted to the interchange of scientific information among investigators throughout the world.

Ideally, such a laboratory should be established for each of the scientific specialties or for groups of sciences where the pattern of research would suggest practical combinations. As a specific example, one laboratory might be devoted to the physiology and biochemistry of mammals. Facilities should include most of the basic instruments of research. In this case, an ultracentrifuge, adequate instrumentation for work with radioactive tracers, and an adequate animal colony might be considered as some of the requisite facilities. The laboratory should be planned to accommodate a group of 200–300 qualified investigators during the "season," with a permanent staff as required for the maintenance of the plant and for technical assistance.

Choice of the location of the existing Marine Laboratories was dictated, to some extent at least, by the marine flora and fauna in the waters adjacent to the selected areas. Similar considerations of special requirements might be desired in certain of the installations here considered, but since the basic materials for research can now be accumulated at any point, other factors should be considered. For example, the purpose of disseminating information might be served better if the location chosen were somewhat removed from the calculated center of concentration of scientists. On the other hand, the location should not be so remote as to make emergency equipment and supplies too difficult to obtain. Since investigators would be expected to spend their vacations at the laboratory, it should be located in a region which has some of the attributes of a desirable vacation area (certainly the case with the Woods Hole Laboratories!).

Details for the operation of the laboratory, for the financing of the venture, for mechanics of invitation of qualified investigators, and a host of other problems should receive careful attention, but at the moment, it is merely the general proposal which I should like to present for discussion among the members of the AAAS. More concrete proposals might be formulated at the forthcoming meetings of the Association.

CHESTER HYMAN

University of Southern California Medical School

The Norton County, Kansas, Meteorite

Fragments from the large detonating bolide that startled the inhabitants of several Midwestern states on February 18 were recovered and identified on April 28 by an expedition sent into the field by the Institute of Meteoritics of the University of New Mexico. Most of the specimens so far recovered have been found on one of the farms of G. W. Tansill in Sections 12 and 13 of Rock Branch Township in Norton County, Kansas, but the largest specimen recovered, a mass weighing over 100 lbs, was recovered on the McKinley ranch in Section 1 of this township. All specimens recovered to date have been either donated to or purchased by the University of New Mexico.

The Norton County meteorite belongs to the rare class of achondrites and, while presenting many points of similarity to the remarkable Cumberland Falls Whitleyite, possesses certain features so distinctive that it seems quite possible that it will serve as the type stone of a new class of achondrites.

A detailed report on the field survey resulting in recovery of the meteorite and a description and analysis of the specimens recovered will be published in the near future.

LINCOLN LAPAZ

University of New Mexico

A Proposed Petition to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature

The numerous applications now before the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, requesting exercise of the Plenary Powers for Suspension of the International Rules and establishment of a number of nomina conservanda, are commanding considerable interest among zoologists. The large number of applications, it is true, has resulted in part from the long hiatus in nomenclatural activity followed by a postwar revival of

interest in nomenclature. Nevertheless, the number has become overwhelming, both for the Commission members who must study them and pass upon their merits and for zoologists who should give them thorough consideration in order that the Commission may have the benefit of various points of view. Some applications, moreover, are too briefly presented and inadequately justified, though the burden of proof should rest on the applicant.

It is generally recognized that letters from scattered workers are a less effective means of demonstrating approval or disapproval than expression by groups of workers. Accordingly, the undersigned subcommittee of the Smithsonian Institution Committee on Zoological Nomenclature, composed of taxonomists of the U. S. National Museum, the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, the Geological Survey, and the Fish and Wildlife Service, has drawn up the following statement, in the hope that it will crystallize opinion and serve as the basis for representations to the Commission. The full Committee has approved the petition and directed the subcommittee to publish it for consideration by other zoologists.

Zoologists are invited and urged to send their reactions to the petition to the undersigned as soon as possible, with the understanding that the Committee will transmit this petition together with all names and comments, both supporting and disagreeing, to the International Commission. All communications at hand will be sent to the Commission in time for the International Congress of Zoology at Paris in July 1948. In order to aid the work of the Committee and to avoid misinterpretation, it is requested that, if possible, a brief and unambiguous statement of approval or disapproval be given, though as much other comment may be added as the individual wishes.

On the Use of the Plenary Powers to Establish Nomina Conservanda

It is not the immediate purpose of the undersigned to discuss the merit of individual proposals now pending, but to present their views on the general question of the use of the Plenary Powers by the Commission.

We believe that the International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature offer a sound foundation for ultimate stability and uniformity. In theory, at least, a standard to which there is no exception is a more solid basis than a standard whose application is weakened by numerous exceptions. In most cases, taxonomists could apply the Rules strictly, with little or no confusion and only a little inconvenience. On the other hand, we recognize that due consideration should be given to common usage of important names by the great body of nontaxonomists, the general zoologists, physiologists, medical men, teachers, and applied zoologists of all kinds. It is reasonable to conclude that the over-all objectives of stability and uniformity would be distinctly furthered if zoologists would agree upon some basic standards satisfactory to both viewpoints.

In the case of a specific or generic name transferred to a different species or genus (e.g. the transfer of the specific name *malariae* from the quartan malaria parasite to the malignant tertian, if the Rules are strictly applied), both the element of inconvenience and that of confusion are involved. Such a situation is likely to present adequate grounds for suspension of the Rules. Misidentified genotypes commonly result in transfers, though not all such cases are of sufficient importance to merit suspension.

Changes resulting from straight synonymy usually cause inconvenience rather than confusion. Experience indicates that even apparently serious changes of this nature can soon become commonly accepted (e.g. the change from *Stegomyia fasciata* to *Aëdes aegypti* for the yellow fever mosquito). Such changes, accordingly, are not grounds for Suspension unless better reason can be demonstrated.

If too many suspensions are allowed, or if suspensions are allowed on weak or unconvincing evidence, the value of the Rules as a basis for stable nomenclature would be depreciated. We are convinced that the International Commission should as soon as possible reassure zoologists that such will not happen. We therefore petition the Commission to set forth some general standards concerning applications for suspension of the Rules and respectfully suggest the following for consideration:

(1) Applications for suspension of the Rules should be *required to demonstrate* that strict application of the Rules would result in *far-reaching and substantial confusion* in the taxonomic use of names and/or in a lamentable change that would *greatly confuse* the literature of a related field (e.g. ecology, malariology, stratigraphic paleontology).

(2) Demonstration of confusion should include adequate bibliographic data showing the amount of usage and the percentage of uniformity. Mere assertion of "greater confusion than uniformity," unsupported by these data, should be considered inadequate.

(3) The Secretary of the Commission should return for additional evidence any application that does not contain the above demonstration and data.

(4) When an application that appears to satisfy the above requirements has been received and notice of its pending consideration has been published, the Commission should on its own initiative actively solicit—not merely passively await—the advice of specialists or other interested and qualified persons or groups from a variety of countries, museums, societies, and educational institutions.

Concerning the method to be employed by the Commission in actively soliciting advice on cases under consideration, it is suggested that, in addition to the regular published invitation to all interested individuals, use be made of existing national, society, and institutional committees on nomenclature, or that special panels in the various branches of taxonomic zoology be established for the purpose. These panels might be headed by, or liaison with them maintained by, various members of the Commission, in order to relieve the Secretary of the extra burden of of these contacts.

CURTIS W. SABROSKY and R. I. SAILER
U. S. National Museum, Washington, D. C.